

Council Meeting – 8 October 2019

Report of Councillor Fran Smith – Housing

Housing Estates

Over the last three months the tenancy team has been working hard on stabilising and getting new staff familiar with their roles and responsibilities and clearing the existing backlogs. The housing service is settling down and we are improving our responsiveness to tenants.

Housing Development and Assets

Performance this quarter:

- 5 buybacks of ex-council houses due to be completed
- 121-123 Outer Circle due to complete (4 units)
- Laxton Rd due to start on site (8 units)

New initiatives this quarter:

- Modern Methods of Construction (MMC): We are investigating new approaches such as modular homes for our council development. No follow up yet from Verto Homes or Zedpod, but follow up from Magna post meeting with Rollalong. Will be requesting surveys from Rollalong for sites with MMC potential.

New business this quarter:

- Appointed Architect for Oxford Inn, and mitigated requirements on planning consultation by providing local evidence on need and usage.
- Reviewed previously investigated garage sites to identify potential for development. Capacity studies now underway.

Responsive Repairs

The Response Repair service maintains performance in line with agreed Council targets, with 90% of all non-emergency jobs so far this year completed on time, and 99% of emergency jobs completed within 24 hours.

Lean Process Reviews

We have brought in 'Lean Partnership' to work alongside us in reviewing the process we follow to let a property, once a tenant leaves.

We looked closely at the process we were following and identified all the areas where we could improve it. We also stepped back and asked "what is the value of this service to our customer and what do they want from it". This enabled us to think "how would a 21st century housing professional design this process from scratch to meet those customer needs in the best and most efficient way possible."

This has resulted in officers across Housing building a new process – one with the customer at the heart and with an ethos of doing it right, first time and seeking continuous improvement.

We will now implement this new process over the coming months and are confident that it will lead to significant reductions in letting times (lost rent between tenancies) and improved service quality and satisfaction.

We are now working with Lean Partnership to review our rent collection and arrears recovery process with an aim to increase rent collection and reduce evictions due to arrears. We plan to follow this up with a review of our responsive repairs process.

HRA Business Plan

We are revisiting our 30 year Housing business plan and this includes setting out our ambitions and priorities for the service around delivery and new social housing alongside a review of finances to support this. This will be in place for the new financial year and will be the framework to drive the housing service over the next few years.

Housing Management System

We are progressing the replacement of the Academy Housing System which will no longer be supported in future. We have completed a Project Initiation Document and are working on the specification for this new system. This is a sizeable project for the service however will be a key tool to enable the modernisation of the service as it will improve self-serve capability, provide a tenant portal and help monitor and manage workloads more effectively.

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

We are pleased with the progress we are making to support rough sleepers. The funding we have achieved for this and the Rough Sleeping Initiative project has effectively halved the numbers of rough sleepers on the streets and this is particularly evident in Taunton. That said, we are aware that in August the number rose slightly, however this is a normal trend during the Summer months, which tends to decline again as we move towards Winter.

Housing Options and Homelessness Service – Staffing levels in the team are now at the required levels and we have recently recruited a private sector officer to increase the number of private rented properties available to the service.

The team has recently reorganised its approach to working and has adopted a drop-in system rather than having pre-booked appointments. This also gives officers more time to work on and progress their cases. Alongside this we have introduced regular case audits as a training aid for staff and to provide confidence on the quality of decision making.

The Council was approached by 216 customers in the quarter to date (June to middle of September)

Homefinder Statistics

The statistics from the Homefinder housing register show us that in September there are nearly 4,000 households in the Somerset West and Taunton area that have registered for social housing. The bedroom need and banding of these applicants is shown in the table below.

This is broken down as follows:

Bedroom Need	Total	Breakdown by banding				
		Emergency	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	2,074	4	200	560	1,310	2,074
2	1,184	2	81	440	661	1,184
3	507	0	33	293	181	507
4	147	0	23	100	24	147
5	20	0	12	7	1	20
6+	1	0	1	0	0	1
Total	3,933	6	350	1,400	2,177	3,933